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Viewing cable 08BEIRUT490, LEBANON: JUMBLATT CONCERNED ABOUT UNIIIC DELAYS,

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08BEIRUT490	2008-04-08 15:59	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Beirut

Appears in these articles:

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: JUMBLATT CONCERNED ABOUT UNIIIC DELAYS,
SUNNI MILITIAS, AND HIZBALLAH FIBER OPTIC NETWORK

REF: A. BEIRUT 480

- [1B.](#) BEIRUT 479
- [1C.](#) BEIRUT 392
- [1D.](#) BEIRUT 391

BEIRUT 00000490 001.2 OF 004

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons
section 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[11.](#) (S) Druze leader Walid Jumblatt expressed concerns about information he had received that former UNIIIC Commissioner Serge Brammertz failed to act for the past year-and-a-half to

act on a key lead discovered by Internal Security Forces Intelligence Officer Wissam Eid, who was assassinated one week after he discussed the lead with Brammertz' replacement, Daniel Bellemare. Jumblatt also was concerned about reports that Saad Hariri's Future Movement was training Sunni militias in Beirut and Tripoli. Finally, Jumblatt wondered why PM Siniora was not reacting to Telecom Minister Hamadeh's recent report on Hizballah's fiber optic network in Lebanon.

¶12. (C) Jumblatt applauded the March 14's Secretariat's efforts to unite the coalition (while criticizing March 14 leaders for saying different things publicly), called Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Michel Sleiman's announcement of early retirement "stupid," and said the Patriarch was now favoring a "mini" cabinet. Jumblatt objected to Speaker Berri's apparent attempts to be received by the French National Assembly, and agreed on the need for March 14 to develop better relationships with independent Shia. End summary.

¶13. (C) Charge Sison, accompanied by Pol/Econ Chief, met with Druze leader Walid Jumblatt at his home in Clemenceau on April 8. Jumblatt was pleased to hear from the Charge that March 14 leader Saad Hariri would return to Lebanon before the April 17-18 visit of NEA A/S Welch. He agreed that Saad's prolonged absence was "not good," especially if it was for purely business reasons, and that the jokes circulating about Saad abiding by the Saudi warning to its citizens to leave Lebanon were a "bad sign."

¶14. (C) Jumblatt acknowledged that the current visit of PM Siniora to Saudi Arabia, where he would join Saad in a meeting with King Abdullah, was a positive development. However, he noted, the Saudis had yet to follow through with their promised \$1 billion deposit for Lebanon's Central Bank, he noted, which indicated they were "not serious."

UNIIIC SAT ON INFORMATION?

¶15. (S) Jumblatt revealed what he deemed a "very serious blow" to the UN Commission investigating the assassination of former PM Rafiq Hariri and others. According to information he received from Internal Security Forces (ISF) Intelligence Director Wissam Hassan the previous evening, Wissam Eid, who worked for Hassan and was assassinated January 25, had discovered a year and a half ago a link between Abd al-Majid Qasim Ghamlush and a network of 17 other cell phone numbers. Former UNIIIC Commissioner Brammertz reportedly did not act upon this information.

¶16. (S) In January 2008, however, after Daniel Bellemare took over as Commissioner, Eid met with Bellemare, and was killed one week later. (Note: UNIIIC contacts have confirmed to us that Eid had met with Bellemare exactly one week prior to his death. End note.) The assassination of Hizballah leader Imad Moughnieh followed two weeks later, leading Jumblatt to believe there was a link between Ramloush and Moughnieh, "assuming Ramloush was still alive."

¶17. (C) The one and a half year delay was a bad sign, Jumblatt continued, suggesting that UNIIIC's case, so far, is weak. Bellemare's request for a six-month extension of UNIIIC's mandate confirms this. But as time goes on, more suspects will disappear and more assassinations will occur, Jumblatt warned.

SUNNI MILITIA PROBLEM

¶18. (S) The second issue Jumblatt raised was Saad's reported training of Sunni militias in Lebanon (allegedly 15,000 members in Beirut and more in Tripoli). In establishing his own "security agencies" in Beirut and Tripoli, Saad was being badly advised by "some people," Jumblatt said, such as ISF General Ashraf Rifi. In his meeting with Jumblatt, Hassan admitted having knowledge that members of Saad's Future Movement were being trained. Hassan reportedly opposed such

training, but "people around Saad" (i.e., Rifi) were telling him to go ahead. (Note: The Jordanians have refused to train Internal Security Forces (ISF) members hand-picked and vetted by the Embassy to participate in a DA/ATA-funded Terrorism Crime Scene Investigation program, reportedly because they don't want to be involved in training "Saad's militia." End note.) Jumblatt said Saad's militia would cause significant damage to March 14, especially because Geagea's Lebanese Forces and Suleiman Franjeh's Marada were in line to train their own forces.

¶9. (C) Meanwhile, the LAF has lost its morale after the January 27 clash with Shia protesters. Jumblatt also decried the casualties inflicted on innocent civilians every time celebratory -- and illegal -- gunshots are fired following a major political speech.

HIZBALLAH'S FIBER
OPTIC NETWORK

¶10. (C) Jumblatt's last agenda item was the recent report on Hizballah's (illegal) fiber optics network in Lebanon. According to fellow Druze and Telecom Minister Marwan Hamadeh, under whose auspices the report had been prepared, the report had not yet officially been presented to PM Siniora, because the "security apparatus" was hesitating to make it official. Jumblatt said that LAF G-2 Intelligence Director George Khoury and ISF General Rifi were talking about coordinating the report with Hizballah security chief Wafiq Safa, who reportedly warned that any action taken against the network would be considered an "act of war." Jumblatt provided Charge with a copy of the map indicating the location of the network.

¶11. (C) Jumblatt expressed perplexity at Siniora's failure to push on the report. (Note: LAF Commander Sleiman asked the same question in his conversation last week with the Charge. End Note.) Defense Minister Elias Murr reportedly was blaming Khoury for the delay.

NEXT STEPS FOR MARCH 14

¶12. (C) Jumblatt complained that March 14 (in part due to Saad's absence) did not yet have a unified position on cabinet expansion, nor on how to respond to Speaker Berri's call for a new National Dialogue. Pulling out a power point presentation prepared by the March 14 Secretariat, he confirmed, however, that the Secretariat was consulting with March 14 leaders on the way forward. One of the Secretariat's ideas was to hold an international conference

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for Lebanon, though it was not clear how, where, or who would host such a conference. He agreed with the Charge that March 14 needed to be proactive, especially to combat the "Lebanon fatigue" that was spreading not only in the international community, but also in his hometown Chouf region, where the people he met with were fed up with the situation.

MICHEL SLEIMAN'S
STATEMENT "STUPID"

¶13. (C) Never one to mince words, Jumblatt called Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Michel Sleiman's recent announcement that he planned to retire August 21, three months before the end of his commission, "stupid." Jumblatt interpreted the announcement as a warning to both the majority and opposition to hurry up with the election. It's as if he's asking us to beg him to stay, Jumblatt said, adding, "He's a nice guy, but not too bright." He called the As-Safir newspaper editor who had interviewed Sleiman "a bad egg."

PATRIARCH FOR MINI-CABINET?

¶14. (C) Noting that Druze MP Wael Abu Four had met with Patriarch Sfeir the previous day, Jumblatt commented that a lot of people "close to the Syrians" were seeing him lately. The Patriarch reportedly was "nervous" about pro-Syrian Marada leader Suleiman Franjeh (who has made several outrageous public statements against the Patriarch in recent months) and was demanding an apology. Sfeir knows that Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun was behind the attacks, Jumblatt said, hence Bishop Matar's recent efforts to reconcile Aoun with the Patriarch.

¶15. (C) On the ongoing political crisis, the Patriarch reportedly favored a "mini" transitional cabinet (NFI). Jumblatt had not heard, as some of other contacts have claimed recently, that the Patriarch was beginning to accept the idea of a simple majority election.

BERRI TO BE RECEIVED
BY FRENCH PARLIAMENT?

¶16. (C) Jumblatt also had heard that Speaker Berri was trying to get an audience with the French National Assembly during his upcoming trip to Paris. Can you imagine how bad this would look, he asked rhetorically, if they receive the Lebanese Speaker who has kept parliament closed for 17 months? French CDA Andre Parant told Charge Sison April 5 that, to the best of his knowledge, no invitation was forthcoming from either the Assemblee Nationale or the French government.

REACHING OUT TO SHIA

¶17. (C) The Charge, noting that some independent Shia were frustrated with their lack of access to March 14 leaders, especially Saad Hariri, asked what March 14 was doing to develop this relationship. Jumblatt said Saad had received money from the Saudis for cultivating both Sunnis and Shia, which he was distributing through Future MPs Okab Saqr and Bassem Saba'. He agreed with the Charge, however, that it was not possible to "buy" Shia support and that more effort was needed. He encouraged the Charge to talk directly to Saad about it or to Saudi Ambassador Khoja, and said he would do the same. Some Shia might prefer to deal directly with the Saudis, he explained. But they also need to have their own independent identity, he added.

¶18. (C) As for his own Shia contacts, Jumblatt, noting that he was having lunch with Ibrahim Shamsaddine later that day, said he also dealt with the Mufti of Tyre, Sayyed Ali al-Amin, whom he labeled "acceptable." He also cited Riad Assad and Youssef Khalil as other good Shia interlocutors, though he dismissed former Ambassador Khalil al-Khalil, recalling his "special militias with the Israelis" during Lebanon's civil war.

¶19. (C) Note: Shemsaddine, son of Higher Shia Council leader Mohammad Mehdi Shemsaddine, is frequently mentioned as a possible Shia minister in an expanded Siniora cabinet. Ambassador al-Khalil was one of the few Shia who attended the recent March 14 convention, as well as a March 13 dinner hosted by the Charge for independent Shia (Refs C and B). Al-Khalil's distant cousin Youssef, who also attended the Charge's dinner, is a close Embassy contact who has a reputation as an impressive and well-respected Central Bank official. Riad Assad also is a well-known and respected contact and a rival of Ahmad Assad, who earned a scant 700 votes compared to Riad's 55,000 in the 2005 parliamentary elections. End note.

COMMENT

¶20. (C) Jumblatt was in reasonably good spirits during this meeting. With the political situation still at an impasse and Saad's extended (more than six weeks by our calendar)

stay abroad, Jumblatt's focus was clearly on intelligence matters. His concerns about Sunni militias are understandable, given that in the past such militias were used against his own Druze forces.

¶21. (C) Though he applauded March 14's efforts to unify the coalition, he offered little insights into his own views on next steps. In the past he has shied away from talk of a simple majority president based on the belief that March 14 did not have sufficient international (especially U.S.) support to go this route. For the time being it seems he, like many in Lebanon, are waiting for the next big event; while we hope that March 14's efforts and those of Saad and Siniora in Saudi Arabia -- or even Berri's current Arab trip -- will lead to a breakthrough, we share Jumblatt's concerns that more assassinations, reports of militia build-ups, and illegal networks will be the reality on the ground instead.
End comment.

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